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**English Department**  
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Dear Honors English 12 British Literature Students:

Welcome to Honors English 12. The course includes some of the masterworks of British literature to offer you an overview of literary traditions as well as an in-depth study of some of the greatest writers of all time. In Honors English 12 you will do a great deal of independent work ranging from presenting an independently read novel to writing and revising a lengthy research paper on a topic using literature as a springboard. You can also expect to be doing a great deal of in-class writing to help you strengthen your writing skills. Reading and writing assignments will be challenging in order to prepare you for the kind of work load you will experience in college. Honors English 12 students are expected to be mature and active readers as well as active participants in class discussions.

As your Honors English 12 instructor, I expect that part of your summer will be spent completing the three-book reading requirement for this class. The summer reading is an important feature of the Honors English 12 program, and our English program as a whole. It serves two functions. **First**, it keeps you active as a reader by broadening your horizons through the texts that now figure largely on college reading lists. **Second**, it keeps you active as a thinker by requiring that you write and think about what you have read. This writing component will ease your transition into the requirements of college writing. This is one of our central goals. As you read each selection, write down thoughts, comments and questions in **a reading journal**. This journal will be used during class discussions of the reading selections. **The complete journal is due the first day of class in August, 2010!**

The summer reading for Honors English 12 consists of two novels and a play. The reading selections and assignments follow:

*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley  
**Summer 2010 Reading Assignment**

**Before reading this novel**, you will need to consult a book of **mythology**. I strongly urge you to reacquaint yourself with the story of *Prometheus*. If you don't have a copy of a mythology book, you can easily find the information you need on line. Knowing this story will help immensely in your understanding of the novel's themes, since Mary Shelley subtitled this novel "The Modern Prometheus." The creation theme of the myth has a strong connection to the theme of Shelley's novel. (Hint!) *Frankenstein* was written during the Romantic period of British literature, and underscores a fear prevalent at that time -- that scientific advances could lead to dire consequences if not carefully regulated. The Romantic writers also emphasized the

restorative powers of Nature and its influence on the imagination. It would also be helpful for you to read “**The Rime of the Ancient Mariner**” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Mary Shelley refers to this poem in the novel, and the two works share common themes.

Please be aware as you read that Frankenstein is the name of the **scientist, NOT the monster**. Frankenstein’s creature does not have a name. This novel traces the experiences of the young male protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, and the tragic consequences of his obsession with science. The idea for this story came to Mary Shelley in a dream. She and her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, were vacationing in Italy with another great poet, Lord Byron. The three decided to have a contest to see who could write the best horror story. Mary’s story is the only one that was completed, and became one of the greatest Gothic horror stories ever written. (Another hint: If you don’t know the definition of Gothic fiction, look it up!) Shelley explores man’s desire for power, fame and adventure as opposed to his need for love and companionship. She also emphasizes that all decisions have consequences which, if ignored, can lead to tragic results.

**Read closely, and take good notes. Read ACTIVELY.** Take notes on the pages of the paperback. Use sticky notes to help you keep track of pages where you find important and significant details. Shelley uses the frame story technique along with flashbacks to reveal her story in pieces. **DO NOT** delude yourself that a quick reading of this novel will suffice. It will not. Once having completed the novel, you will need to go back and revisit the chapters to get a better understanding of what Shelley was attempting to do. **WARNING! Do NOT watch a movie version of *Frankenstein* and think you know the story. Every movie version that has ever been made is SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT from the novel.**

### ***Frankenstein* Writing Assignment**

- The novel has three narrators: Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature. You are to **write a short reflective piece** (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced) on each narrator and the events and decisions that shape that character’s growth, leading to major themes in the novel. **State specifically what theme each narrator brings out in the novel.**
- The frame of the novel is as follows: It begins and ends with narration by Robert Walton. Directly after Walton’s first narrative section and before his ending narration, Victor Frankenstein relates the history of his life and scientific experiments. In the middle of the novel, the Creature tells his own story. Therefore, you should have a total of three short reflective pieces – one for each narrative section.
- These three pieces are due the first day of class in August, 2010.
- In your reading journal, list examples of at least 5 other literary devices (metaphors, motifs, symbols, etc.) Shelley employs in the novel.
- Notice the way Shelley frequently refers to poetry in the novel. In your reading journal, write some comments about how these references to poetry enhance your understanding of the novel.
- Your reading journal will be checked on the first day of class in August, 2010.

*Othello*  
By William Shakespeare  
Summer 2010 Reading Assignment

*Othello*, written in 1604, is a play that explores the nature of love and the destructive power of jealousy. The title character Othello, a general in the Venetian army, falls in love with the gentle and beautiful Desdemona. They marry against the wishes of Desdemona's father, Brabantio. Their marriage is undermined by the jealousy of Othello's nemesis, Iago, a character who represents pure evil. This is a play of complex characters, intriguing plot twists, and profound themes. It explores topics which are quite relevant to our modern world – racism, spousal abuse, placing trust in the wrong people, and lack of true communication in relationships. Iago weaves a web of evil so cleverly that the characters do not see their tragic ends coming until it is much too late. Othello is a true tragic hero – a character who starts out as a respected man of authority who falls from grace due to a tragic flaw. Othello's flaw is his jealousy, and this makes him vulnerable to Iago's schemes.

Like any Shakespeare play, *Othello* requires close reading and attention to footnotes. Please DO NOT resort to Spark Notes! Challenge yourself and use the notes given to you in the book!

*Othello*  
Summer 2010 Writing Assignment

1. Keep a reading journal to help keep track of characters, their relationships, their motives, and their "blind spots."
2. In your journal, create a plot outline in which you list the events of the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution of the play. Be very specific about where the climax occurs in the play. Your journal is due the first day of class in August, 2010.
3. Choose any **TWO** of the following topics. Write a 1-2 page reflective piece for each topic. These two reflections should be typed, double-spaced, and are due on the first day of class in August, 2010.
  - a. How do the characters' illusions prevent them from seeing the reality of their situation and help bring them to disaster? Be very specific in your answer.
  - b. Discuss how the handkerchief becomes a powerful symbol in this play. Is there any irony in the significance and power Othello attaches to it and its function in the plot?
  - c. Trace the steps by which Iago poisons Othello's mind against his wife and his friend. What factor helps Iago to fool Othello so easily?
  - d. Each character experiences a moment of truth as the play develops. What is the moment of truth for Emilia, Roderigo, Desdemona, and Othello? Does Iago have one? If not, why not?

**Senior All School Summer Reading Selection**  
***Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger**  
**Summer 2010 Reading Assignment**

*Peace Like a River* is a novel about the Land family – eleven-year-old narrator Reuben, his miracle-working father Jeremiah, his outlaw older brother Davy, and his younger sister Swede. Set in the Minnesota countryside and the Badlands of Dakota in the 1960's, *Peace Like a River* takes the reader on an incredible journey with the Land family as they search for Davy after his escape from prison. Leif Enger has combined elements of tragedy, romance, adventure story and religious allusion to create a story rich in the themes of family love and religious faith and the trust that is required of both. This is a novel that should inspire much meditation as you read, and stimulate great class discussion when we meet in August.

***Peace Like a River***  
**Writing Assignment**

1. As you read, write your reactions to the story in your journal. Comment on the actions of the main characters and how you feel about their experiences.
2. In your journal, list at least 5 examples of literary devices (metaphor, allusion, symbols, etc.) used by Enger in the novel. Your journal is due on the first day of class in August, 2010.
3. Write a 1-2 page reflective piece on **ONE** of the following topics. Your reflection should be typed and double-spaced. This reflection is due on the first day of class in August, 2010.
  - a. Swede, Reuben's imaginative, prolific, and precocious younger sister, creates an epic poem about a cowboy named Sunny Sundown. Talk about Sunny's ongoing saga as an ironic commentary on Reuben's larger narrative. What are the parallels?
  - b. Besides the Sunny Sundown text, several other outlaw tales, literary allusions, biblical legends, and historical asides are offered by Swede or by Reuben himself. Identify a few of these stories-within-the-story, explaining how each enriches or influences the main narrative.
  - c. Both during Davy's trial and after his escape from prison, we encounter a variety of public viewpoints on what Reuben's brother has done. Such viewpoints, usually presented as personal letters or newspaper editorials, are always steadfast yet often contradictory. What does Reuben seem to realize about the so-called "court of public opinion" in light of these viewpoints?
  - d. Prayer is described in many ways and on many occasions in the novel. What larger points about religion and human nature might Enger be making with his various depictions of people at prayer? What power does Reuben recognize in his own prayers? Discuss the impact prayer has on Reuben, and how it transforms him.

**General Directions for all Summer Reading Assignments:**

1. **Annotations:** Annotations are required! Highlight, underline, write comments in the margins, use sticky tabs to mark important pages. Get in the habit of reading actively now. This is a requirement for the class and a part of your grade.
2. **Vocabulary:** Purchase a good paperback dictionary and keep it handy as you read. Use a section of your journal to create a glossary of words you looked up as you read each book. I expect to see a good number of words and their definitions in this section of your journal. If a word has more than one definition, be sure you are writing down the definition that fits the context in which you found it.
3. **Connections:** Look for commonalities in the works. Be able to discuss common themes, character traits, symbols, motifs, and narrative devices.
4. **Don't procrastinate!** These books are all complex and require your undivided attention. There is no way that you will do them justice if you wait until the week before we come back to school to begin reading. Start now. Read them closely, carefully, and thoughtfully. Remember that good readers are RE-READERS! Great literature must be revisited to be truly appreciated. Be prepared to discuss all selections on day one.
5. **Keep in touch.** If you have any questions about the books as you read over the summer, e-mail me ([nformanski@montini.org](mailto:nformanski@montini.org)). I'll be happy to discuss the books with you at any time.

I look forward to working with you in class next year. Be ready for a challenging and rewarding year as we explore some of the greatest works of literature ever written.  
Happy reading! ☺